

Regarding the Raised Bill No. 1054: An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia

I would like to address: Senator Slossberg and Representative Fleischmann  
(Co-Chairs of Education and Education Committee Members)

There is one statement on page 2 of Bill No. 1054 that I would like to address:

*“the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions  
for, students with dyslexia”*

Too many students in Connecticut are in crisis because they do not know how to read or write. Most are children with dyslexia, a neurological condition that requires specific instruction to learn how to utilize letters that are a human invention, not natural, and involve a complicated process of instruction.

A bright first grader told his teacher last year, “Reading is like putting a dagger in my ear and turning it.” Can you even imagine how painful it was for this little boy to be in a classroom and see his classmates advance far ahead of him? Too many preteens and teenagers with dyslexia develop emotional and behavior problems, or go the way of crime and end up in jail because of the shame of not learning to read or write.

The reading wars continue within our colleges and public schools. Teachers are too frequently instructed to not use phonics, a commonly used word that is grossly misunderstood by many educational professionals. Fads have usurped scientific evidence and therefore teachers are not appropriately trained. Yet teachers are held accountable for students to learn to read and write at both the state and federal level.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has developed several excellent initiatives that provide standards for good reading instruction\*. Yet these good resources, sit on shelves and most teachers do not know they exist. Most recently the state has initiated the *Common Core*, yet school systems select what they want to use from it and typically overlook the part that emphasizes valid reading instruction in grades K-3.

There is hope. Dyslexia has been added as a category on the state IEP and should do away with the fallacy that psychologist and medical professionals rather than teachers should treat dyslexia. Bill No. 1054 does not go far enough. There is no mention or guidance proposed of how the detection, recognition, and implementation of evidence based reading instruction will be done, nor how administrators and teachers will be trained to do the recognition and intervention. Many state teacher college professionals know how to teach appropriate reading and writing instruction. However, many more professors and administrators do not agree with them and take objection to the colleges teaching it. There is no expectation for all teachers working toward teacher certification to have evidence-coursework in evidence-based literacy instruction. In fact, I understand there is only one state required reading course – Literacy. This on its own will not teach students how to read or write. This is unconscionable and will only perpetuate student failure.

Teacher Training happens in some private schools, clinics, small private practices, and companies that represent programs. Does the State Department of Education and the General Assembly truly want the private sector to train teachers and teach students who are under their domain? Bill #1054 requires more specific directives to Connecticut teacher colleges to develop a higher education curriculum that actualizes the International Dyslexia Associate Knowledge and Practice Standards and/or the Orton-Gillingham Approach, since both include similar standards that are proven to be successful. I strongly appeal to you to attend to appropriate literacy instruction so Connecticut students learn how to read and write in public schools to the best of their ability, and will no longer compare reading to putting daggers in their ears or choose crime rather than school.

I speak from experience. I have worked in education with individuals with dyslexia since the 1960's in schools and in 1983 I started a private practice that evolved into a larger business, Learning House, that continues today. Learning House has the distinction of being accredited by the Academy of Orton-Gillingham for teacher training and the instruction we provide to students of all ages. We often have had a waiting list because of our success teaching our students to read and write and to understand what dyslexia is. I train public school teachers along with others who are interested how to teach using the Orton-Gillingham Approach. Furthermore, I have always been supportive of schools learning how to teach the most dyslexic students to read using proven practice. Every time I train, I hear "why didn't we get this in our college courses?" I don't have an answer. When I consult with schools, I talk to administrators about how they could have more student success if the teachers were trained with proven instruction. Instructing students and training teachers has been very gratifying because our instruction is evidence based and produces success. I wish every public school teacher and administrator involved in literacy instruction could experience similar success.

Respectfully submitted,

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